


# APPROVED: Revisions to the Public Information Policy


At its February 2009 meeting, The Joint Commission's Board of Commissioners approved a revision to the Public Information Policy to allow The Joint Commission to report to appropriate governmental and licensing authorities serious safety issues that fall short of an Immediate Threat to Health and Safety. This change, **effective immediately**, affects **all accreditation and certification** programs.

Previously, the policy stated that The Joint Commission could release information to appropriate authorities about an accredited organization only if the The Joint Commission takes action to deny accreditation under the Immediate Threat to Health and Safety process. However, the policy was silent on whether The Joint Commission could release information about a serious situation relative to patient care and/or safety even though the situation may have been of major interest or concern to the general public. Recent changes to the policy allow The Joint Commission to serve in a public accountability role by communicating information to the general public. See the box below for an excerpt from the policy, which shows the revisions in underlined text.

## Risk to Patients or the Public

The revisions to the policy allow The Joint Commission to disclose, with approval by The Joint Commission president, information to appropriate authorities. This disclosure addresses all public risk even for individuals not currently receiving care from the organization. For example, the issue may extend beyond a single organization to affect several regional providers. Depending on the issue, the information may be communicated to the state department of health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or other appropriate bodies. If the risk to the public lies strictly within the specific organization, it will be required to provide documentation to The Joint Commission that it notified its board of the risk and its actions to mitigate the risk.

Questions about changes to the *Public Information Policy* should be directed to Gail Weinberger, director of Accreditation and Certification Policy and Administration, at 630-792-5766 or [gweinberger@jointcommission.org](mailto:gweinberger@jointcommission.org). 



**Official Publication of Revised Policy**

## Revisions to the Public Information Policy

**APPLICABLE TO ALL ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS**

**Effective Immediately**

**Data Release to Government Agencies and Organizations with Which The Joint Commission Performs Coordinated Survey Activities**

The Joint Commission makes available to federal, state, local, or other government certification or licensing agencies or public health agencies, and to organizations with which The Joint Commission performs survey activities, specific accreditation-related information under the following circumstances:

- When The Joint Commission identifies a serious situation in an organization that may jeopardize the health or safety of patients or the public and immediately takes action to deny accreditation.
- When The Joint Commission identifies a serious situation in an organization that may have jeopardized the health or safety of previous patients or the public, or that represents a pattern of risk that extends beyond the organization. If the health care organization or the practitioner reports the situation themselves to the appropriate authorities, The Joint Commission will evaluate whether it, too, should report the situation.
- Upon request, when the request involves otherwise publicly available information.